OPINION

BY F.S. AIJAZUDDIN

Trust no one

LEADERS should trust no one. Dictators in particular should be careful when choosing their security staff. Many have paid the price for their negligence.

Mrs Indira Gandhi trusted her Sikh bodyguards and died at their hands in October 1984. In 2003, Iraqi militants led US-led forces to Saddam Hussein who was found hiding in a small underground bunker. He was tried and hanged by his own people. Libyan leader Col Muammar Qaddafi remained paranoid about security. Even on his travels abroad to Europe, Russia or the US, he preferred to live in a bulletproof tent. Such precautions could not protect him from attacks by Nato bombers and vengeful Libyans.

Perhaps the most dramatic betrayal of a dictator occurred in South Korea in 1979, when president Park Chung-hee was shot by Kim Jae-gyu, head of his own Korean Central Intelligence Agency. The killing took place over dinner in a KCIA safe house.

Is no refuge sacred? Apparently not, as Venezuelan president Nicol s Maduro discovered when US troops burst into his bedroom in the presidential palace in Caracas and abducted him and his wife. One report has described it as "the riskiest and most high-profile military operation sanctioned by Washington since the US Navy's SEAL team killed Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, in a safe house in Pakistan's Abbottabad in 2011".

Similarities between the two are more than cosmetic. Operation Neptune Spear to capture Bin Laden had been planned for months. The assault team of SEALs practised on a full-scale replica of OBL's compound. The actual operation was carried out by four helicopters, 79 SEAL commandos and a dog. It took 38 minutes to accomplish. The action was watched live by president Barack Obama, secretary of state Hillary Clinton and their team.

Operation Absolute Resolve on Jan 3 aimed at capturing Venezuelan president Maduro. According to Gen Dan Caine (chairman, US Joint Chiefs of Staff), it had been "carefully rehearsed for months". President Donald Trump revealed that "they actually built a house, which was identical to the one they went into, with all the same — all that steel all over the place".

About 150 aircraft were involved, taking off from 20 different air bases across the Western Hemisphere. US forces disabled Venezuela's air defence systems and plunged its capital Caracas into darkness, allowing US helicopters to land in Maduro's palace grounds at 2:01 am. Within 30 minutes, the Venezuelan president and his wife were in US custody. An undisclosed number of casualties included Maduro's more loyal security staff.

Trump watched the operation live from his Mar-a-Lago club in Florida, attended by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and CIA director John Ratcliffe. "It was an incredible thing to see," he crowed: "If you would have seen what happened, I mean, I watched it literally like I was watching a television show. And if you would've seen the speed, the violence … it was an amazing thing."

Ironically, now that Maduro is out of the way, Trump's plans to jump-start democracy in Venezuela do not include its opposition leader Mar a Machado (a Venezuelan counterpart to Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi). Aung San Suu Kyi won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991. Machado was awarded the same prize in 2025 (as an affront to Trump). Even though she dedicated her award to Trump, it has obviously not been enough to relieve his bile.

A recent expos — *The Mission: the CIA in the 21st century* by the Pulitzer prize-winning author Tim Weiner — concludes with these questions: "What would stop the president from declaring martial law or cancelling elections? Could Congress or the supreme court oppose him? Who would disobey him if he ordered the clandestine service to rebuild the secret prisons, overthrow a sovereign nation, or assassinate his political enemies?"

> Is no refuge sacred? Apparently not.

These are questions that may agitate European capitals. Beijing and Moscow are not bothered. While Trump may salivate over his next mouthful — Iran, Beijing will swallow Taiwan in fulfilment of its One China policy. Russia with unassuaged imperial longings looks beyond Ukraine.

And how do South American countries feel now that Trump has foreshortened his focus on a North-South axis? Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Uruguay and Colombia have chided the US for creating this "dangerous precedent for peace and regional security". They are, however, reluctant to fight for the Venezuelan flag.

In 1982, South American leaders were quick to acknowledge the Colombian author Gabriel Garc a M rquez when he won the Nobel Prize for Literature. They should reread his award-winning book *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and recall this advice to his fellow Hispanics: "Superpowers and other outsiders have fought over us for centuries in ways that have nothing to do with our problems. In reality we are all alone." ■

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BY NAWEEN A. MANGI

Preserving dance

IN Pakistan, the word most commonly used for dance — *naach* — is often deployed as a form of ridicule. To say someone *naach raha hai* is rarely neutral; it carries connotations of mockery, moral suspicion and social inferiority. This linguistic discomfort reflects a deeper unease with the art itself — one that has steadily pushed dance to the margins of our cultural life.

Kathak, one of the classical dance forms of the subcontinent, stands in stark contrast to this perception. The word derives from '*katha*', meaning story. Kathak is not merely movement set to rhythm; it is a complete art form with theory, practice, meaning and purpose. Its purpose is storytelling — and any story, spiritual or otherwise, can be told through it. This is why Kathak has endured for centuries, evolving across temples, courts and public spaces, absorbing influences while retaining its core.

It is exquisitely beautiful to watch, embodied with immense grace and depth. But beauty alone is not why it deserves preservation. Kathak is worth saving because it is ours. It is cultural memory carried in bodies, gestures and rhythms, passed down not through books alone but through living practice.

Mohsin Babar, a highly trained *kathakar* with over 25 years of experience, recalls a time in Karachi when dance thrived through systems of *ustaadi* and *shagirdi*. The Maharaj, Samaraath and Patiala *gharanas* nurtured distinctive styles, and *dangals* — artistic battles — were held where dancers tested their skills before *ustaads* and peers. Dance was competitive, rigorous and alive, says Babar, who trained under Ustad Hamid Hussain Shaad Jaipuri and Ustad Shado Maharaj, Pakistan's pioneering Kathak maestros, before going on to receive advanced training in India under Ustad Rajendra Gangani.

That ecosystem has largely disappeared. There are still people who want to learn, but the scarcity of viable career pathways discourages serious investment in training. "You see many people wearing a *peshwaaz* with *ghungroos* strapped on," Babar notes, "but that alone does not make them *kathakars*." So diminished has the tradition become that even finding a *tablanawaz* who understands how to accompany Kathak can be difficult.

Today, the limited opportunities that do exist are often dominated by a small, elite clique, which is why the same names recur repeatedly. For most dancers — many self-taught, highly skilled and deeply committed — survival depends on sporadic, poorly paid performances at weddings and private events. Artistic growth, sustained training and meaningful performance platforms remain out of reach for the majority.

This marginalisation has been reinforced by institutional decisions. When Zia Mohyeddin founded the National Academy of Performing Arts, he insisted on including dance, recognising it as a vital pillar of the performing arts. Yet in a recent restructuring, dance was dropped as a subject altogether. This is deeply troubling, as NAPA is precisely the kind of institution that should house a full-fledged dance department, not erase the form.

Like many things in our society, dance has become exclusionary. It excludes talented performers from mainstream stages, offers virtually no scholarships to young, self-taught dancers seeking formal training, and denies audiences in villages and smaller cities access to the spiritual and aesthetic experience dance can offer. Cultural production remains concentrated in major urban centres, reinforcing hierarchies of class, geography and access.

> If dance is to survive in Pakistan, it must be supported intentionally.

Taboo only deepens this crisis. Almost every dancer has a story of intense familial opposition — of being told that dance is shameful or immoral. The fact that dancers can barely earn a living only heightens this resistance. When society offers neither respect nor security, passion alone becomes unsustainable.

And yet, dance endures. Because dance is not simply performance; it is an archive. It carries history, devotion, joy and grief through muscle memory and rhythm. It is culture preserved not in glass cases, but in living, breathing bodies.

If dance is to survive in Pakistan, it must be supported intentionally. We must invest in rigorously trained artists willing to pass on their knowledge, create scholarships for those with talent but no access, and support platforms that take performance beyond elite venues into towns, villages and community spaces.

Preserving dance is not nostalgia. It is an act of cultural responsibility. If we allow this language of the body to disappear, we lose not just an art form, but a way of telling our own stories. ■

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FROM THE PAST PAGES OF DAWN

1976 | Fifty years ago

Last date for dodgers

ISLAMABAD: March 1, 1976, has been fixed as the last date for voluntary filing of tax returns by people who are liable to pay tax "but have so far sidetracked this basic duty". This decision was taken at a high-level meeting held here today [Jan 7] under the chairmanship of the Federal Finance Minister, Mr. Mohammad Hanif. It was resolved to launch a comprehensive and integrated campaign throughout the country to bring to book all those who have been escaping their tax obligation by employing one tactic or another.

The operation will include a country-wide organised survey of potential taxpayers, strengthening of tax recovery organisation of the Income Tax Department, streamlining of tax administration machinery and simplification of tax realisation methods. The meeting also decided that after the expiry of the deadline all steps, both legal and administrative, will be taken to unearth such persons. In that case, the defaulters will face severe consequences. Addressing the meeting, the Finance Minister … said serious efforts needed to be made to mobilise domestic resources to meet the country's mounting development requirements. — News agencies

1951 | Seventy-five years ago

Embittered Egypt

CAIRO: Egyptian political quarters are surprised at the sudden increased activity by the Bharati Ambassador who has initiated a wide Press campaign professing friendship towards Egypt and at the same time is protesting against certain statements of the Egyptian Ambassador in Pakistan which he alleged were not in accordance with the neutral attitude that Egypt should adopt.

All this activity, it is believed, is aimed at diverting the attention from the two events which occurred last week and were not favourable to Bharat. The first was the successful visit of Mr Fazlur Rahman and his contacts with Prime Minister Nahas Pasha and the Education Minister, Taha Hussein, and other officials. The Egyptian authorities were recently so impressed by the cordiality shown by Mr Rahman that Taha Hussein offered to sign a cultural treaty between the two countries.

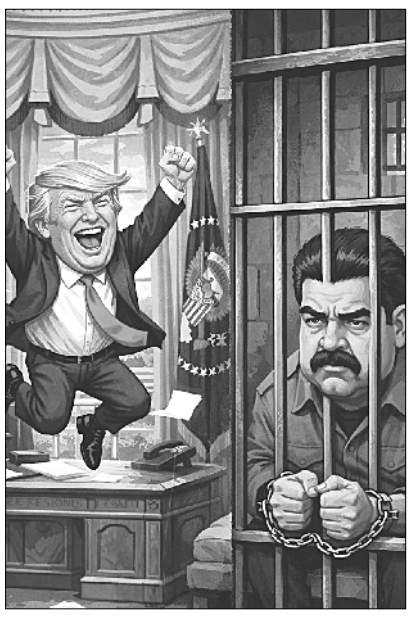
The other event was the ... statement by Pandit Nehru ... on the evacuation of British troops from Egypt. Mr Nehru's statement tore the curtain of Bharat's false pretences towards Egypt… . The statement was ... resented by Wafdist dailies. … The Egyptian State Broadcasting system also condemned it... . — Report

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@dawn.com

Letters may be edited for purposes of clarity and space. All letters should carry the writer's address, CNIC and phone numbers.

World order on the verge of collapse



THIS is with reference to the report 'US grabs Maduro in outrageous Venezuela raid' (Jan 4). The attack by the United States on Venezuela and the abduction of President Nicol s Maduro and his wife through kinetic military action constitute a direct use of force against a sovereign state. It not only breaches Venezuela's territorial integrity, but also its political independence, which is a clear violation of Article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter.

Dispatching armed forces into another country to abduct its head of state squarely qualifies as 'aggression' under international law and is unequivocally illegal. Yet, as the Greek philosopher Thucydides famously said, "the powerful do whatever they can and the weak suffer what they have to".

On what moral or legal grounds, then, can the West object if tomorrow China launches a 'special operation' to seize the president of Taiwan, or Russia tries to do the same with Volodymyr Zelensky? No sovereign tolerates another sovereign within its territory, nor does international law permit such a conduct.

The end of the Cold War emboldened the US. Having emerged victorious, with Russia weakened and China still developing, the US found itself without a peer competitor and entered endless wars, often without serious consideration of long-term consequences.

From Afghanistan to Iraq, from Libya to Syria, and from shielding Israeli war crimes to using Ukraine as a pawn, the US-led West has behaved as the global policeman, repeatedly violating the very international order it established after the Second World War.

These actions have not only weakened the order, but also shattered the myth of Western credibility and moral authority.

US hegemonic actions have affected not only its adversaries, but its allies as well. Europe's influence began eroding after the Second World War, but after the Cold War its strategic autonomy became deeply compromised. Acting largely as a collection of US satellite states has had profound, psychological and political consequences for Europe.

What the world is witnessing today in Eastern Europe, Gaza and now Latin America reflects not confidence, but frustration, the turbulence of a collapsing power struggling hard to preserve fading dominance.

At the same time, a rising China and revisionist Russia are building their case by investing in and engaging with the Global South, which constitutes nearly 80 per cent of the world's population, positioning themselves, rightly or wrongly, as alternatives to a Western order that increasingly appears selective, coercive and self-serving.

History shows beyond doubt or debate that all great powers eventually fall after reaching their peak. The US is no exception.

Abdullah Ali
Karachi

Education woes

ACCORDING to the British Council itself, 100,000 candidates will be appearing in the O level examinations this year. The examination fee for eight O level subjects is about Rs211,000. This means the Cambridge University earns about Rs21 billion from Pakistan alone in just a single O level session.

Sadly, the entire annual higher education budget of the federal government is only Rs6 billion. While the elite class spends Rs21 billion on the examination alone, this amount can run the Quaid-i-Azam University for five years, the University of Karachi for six years, and the Shah Abdul Latif University for 10 years.

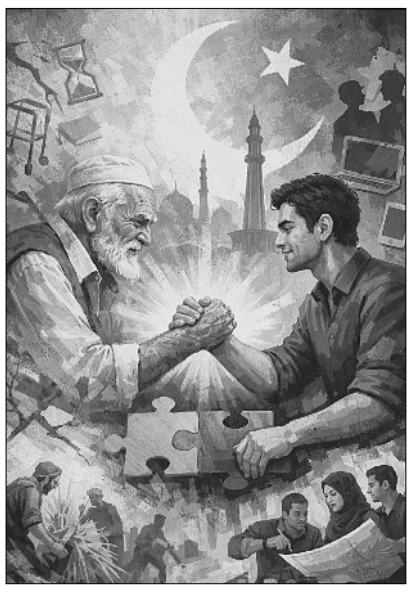
The amount does not include the fee for A level and other such examinations. If we include everything, the Cambridge University earns about Rs30 billion in one session in terms of examination fee alone. Since these examinations are held twice a year, the total amount actually crosses the Rs50 billion mark annually from Pakistan alone.

International educational institutions take advantage of the weaknesses of our system and mint money from us, dragging out our intelligent children. Unless the government itself sets up good-quality and modern educational institutions, we will keep losing our money and meritorious students to external educational systems.

Instead of blaming foreign universities, we need to create government institutions that can compete, and where every poor and rich child gets an equal opportunity. If we have high-quality education, we will neither lose money, nor will our human intelligence become the capital of others.

Aaqib Uddin Mahesar
Karachi

It is not over



YOU are young and frustrated, and that frustration is understandable. You have grown up during economic pressure, political noise and nonstop comparison with the rest of the world. You see flaws clearly, and you have the right to demand better. But demanding better does not mean ignoring the value of experience.

Every generation believes it sees the truth more clearly than the one before it. That belief is not new, and it is not a proof that older generations are useless. Progress has never come from wiping the slate clean. It comes from combining fresh ideas with hard-learned lessons.

Look at Pakistan's position in the world today. Despite internal challenges, Pakistan remains globally visible diplomatically, strategically and politically. After moments of regional tension, including conflicts with India, it was not hashtags or viral posts that shaped outcomes. It was experienced diplomats, military leadership and long-established institutions that handled pressure, avoided escalation and protected national interests.

That experience matters. Global standing is not built overnight, and it is not built online. It is built through protracted negotiations, restraint and understanding of consequences. Older leadership has lived through wars, sanctions, isolation and recovery. It knows what instability costs not just emotionally, but also economically and socially. You have access to more information than any generation before you. That is power — but it is also a risk. Speed does not equal accuracy, and confidence does not equal competence. Algorithms reward outrage, not nuance. Wisdom still comes from time, mistakes and responsibility. You want freedom, and you should. But freedom survives only when paired with discipline and structure. Regulations, institutions and slow decision-making exist because history proves what happens without them.

When systems fail, the answer is not always to remove them; it is to fix them. Disengaging, leaving or tuning out does not challenge power; it hands power away. Real change means participating: voting, organising, learning how systems work, and pushing from the inside.

Your energy matters, your ideas matter, and your impatience can even be useful. But experience matters, too. Nations move forward not when generations fight each other, but when they work together. It is not over. It is not 'old versus young'. It is your turn to step in, guided by those who have already seen what happens when things go wrong. That is how countries survive. That is how they make progress.

Abdul Samad Gaad
Karachi

Exorbitant fines

THE Punjab government's recent move to introduce stringent traffic fines seems disconnected from reality. While the intention behind stricter penalties is to improve road safety and discipline, many believe it is unfair to burden the common man with hefty fines. For ordinary citizens, these penalties feel out of touch with their struggles. When people are battling inflation, scarce healthcare, and a lack of quality education, such punitive measures raise serious questions about government priorities.

It is not that traffic laws should be ignored; road safety matters. But governance should mean more than just enforcing rules on the weak, while ignoring bigger injustices. Public welfare demands that the government focus on affordable healthcare, reliable education and fair opportunities, not just penalties. People deserve more than fines; they deserve facilities and fairness.

As such, the enforced move will extract Rs100,000 from motorists lacking a fitness certificate, or imprison them for six months. Meanwhile, in the markets, the cost of a kilogramme of flour is beyond the reach of many. The real question is not whether the law is stringent enough, but whether the enforcement energy directed at traffic violations might have been better deployed elsewhere. The government's priority should be to provide basic necessities, control inflation, and promote transparency and accountability. Only then will reforms be meaningful.

Dr Muhammad Mehboob Hassan Khan
Multan

▶ **QUAID-I-AZAM DAY:** It is disheartening to see that the Quaid-i-Azam Day, a day meant to honour the founder of Pakistan, often passes without proper recognition. Schools, media and public institutions should focus on his vision and legacy, but attention is increasingly getting diverted towards festivities related to Christmas. While respecting the religious practices of all citizens is important, neglecting national days diminishes our collective memory and understanding of Pakistan's history. The day should be an occasion for reflection on the Quaid's principles and commitment to the nation. It is the duty of educational institutions and media houses to ensure that all national days are appropriately commemorated.
Zehra Kashif
Karachi

▶ **COMMENDABLE MEASURES:** The strict implementation of traffic laws by the traffic police, as per the instructions of Punjab chief minister, is commendable. Modern initiatives, such as e-challans, body-worn cameras (BWCs) and driving simulators, have transformed the entire system and improved the performance of traffic police. There is now a strong and urgent need to introduce technological reforms in the police department as well. Investigations and open court hearings should be regularly conducted online to ensure justice and transparency. This step will surely enhance public trust in the provincial government.
Muhammad Iqbal Awan
Mianwali

▶ **UNHYGIENIC CONDITIONS:** Piles of garbage are present at various places across Rawalpindi. Sewerage lines are broken, gutters are choked and stinking water stands on various roads. These insanitary conditions are affecting people's health. They are suffering from various diseases. Overflowing sewers and stagnant pools of wastewater have become breeding grounds for mosquitoes. A lot of people are suffering from malaria and their health is deteriorating by the day. The officials and departments concerned should take urgent and effective measures ti improve the quality of life of the people.
Zain-ul-Abdeen
Rawalpindi

External Ombudsman

Veteran journalist Muhammad Ali Siddiqi is *Dawn's* External Ombudsman (DEO). His duty is to attend to our readers' complaints, and to respond to them professionally. DEO is the investigating authority to whom all complaints can be referred, and it is DEO who takes notice of any alleged violations of *Dawn's* code of ethics, and informs the Editor for appropriate action.
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